

CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
CHINESE CULTURE MIDTERM EXAM
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Complete any 5 of the following questions:

1. Buddhism was enthusiastically received by the mass of Chinese peasants but looked upon as a threat by the literati who governed the nation. Discuss the dynamics of the divergent views between the peasants and the literati as well as the dynamics at play preventing the literati from doing anything about it until the Tang Dynasty seized the “Mandate of Heaven”.

To the literati, Buddhism was not a Chinese developed notion so they considered it a barbarian thought. However, China, being a secular society, offered very little to sustain a common man’s spiritual appetite. Buddhism appealed to peasants because there were some similarities between Daoism and Buddhism; both taught the power of inner peace, acceptance and contemplation. It filled a spiritual void, and the peasants embraced it as a path of hope from the drudgery of everyday toil. Buddhism explained human suffering and gave hope that it would one day be rewarded. To literati however, who placed high value on social responsibility, Buddhism appeared profoundly un-Chinese. It provided escape from social responsibility and family obligations with an emphasis on monastic lifestyle, which contradicted the Confucian beliefs. After all, according to Confucian belief, when people stray from their specific role in life, the social order is upset. Since the spread of Buddhism occurred toward the end of a dynasty where the political power was decentralized, the literati were powerless to control its spread. It was only after Tang Dynasty came to power that literati could try and reverse the spread of Buddhism, and this was done through seizing Buddhist lands and returning them to the state, and ordering monks and nuns to return to their home villages. Buddhism was not banned, but it needed to be under strict government control.

2. The Mongols were skilled warriors who were able to establish a vast empire. Their fierce spirit and thirst for new lands chilled people as far as Europe. China was an easy military conquest for the Mongols but much more difficult for them to govern. They established the Yuan Dynasty which became one of the shortest

dynasties to ever govern China. Discuss why the Yuan Dynasty was so short lived.

Unlike the traditional seizure of Mandate, Yuan Dynasty was more of a military takeover, and as such, it was far outside of traditional Chinese thought. Furthermore, Yuan rule did not comply with the traditional ideas of Heqin, the idea that Chinese culture is so superior to their enemies that they will in time be assimilated. Far from assimilating, Mongols did not trust the Chinese. They held all the primary posts, eliminated the exam system, and refused to learn Chinese, establishing translation bureaus across China instead.

Intermarriage of Chinese and Mongols was forbidden, which was at the very heart of the idea of Heqin, or assimilating the enemies. All this led to a pretty stable Chinese opposition. Furthermore, Yuan was open to all religions and encouraged new academic ideas and art. There was an openness and interest in non-Chinese ideas which clashed with Chinese ethnocentrism. Kublai Khan had turned out to be the only competent Yuan leader, and between 1320 and 1329, Yuan went through four Emperors. Beijing Mongols began to lose their legitimacy with the Mongols still in Mongolia, because they were perceived as having become too Chinese, and Mongol rebellions began in the North. Finally, even the nature contributed to the decline of Yuan when the Yellow River changed course, resulting in massive floods and famine, which ushered in a major rebellion of the people.

3. In the 4th century B.C. there were 2 prevailing philosophies emerging that set the tone for Chinese culture – Confucianism and Daoism. Confucianism set the precepts for government and Daoism became a prevailing force for the people. Both contributed significantly in the development of the Chinese people. Compare and contrast Confucianism and Daoism and explain what they contributed to China.

Confucianism established the social values, institutions, and transcendent ideals of Chinese society. It stresses value for patience, reverence for ancestors, respect for the wisdom of the elders, and placing the responsibility for the individual to the group. The Confucian Code states that children must show filial piety to the parents, wives must respect husbands, and all people must respect the Emperor. Each individual has a role

they must perform, and these rules exist so the society can remain harmonious. All men are born equal, but a man could improve his lot in life through education and the accumulation of education. According to Confucianism, all men were at the mercy of nature, with the exception of the Emperor who was expected to control those forces. Daoism, the philosophy of the common man, is similar to Confucianism when it came to respect for the forces of nature, but while Confucianism sought to control those forces, Daoism sought to be one with the nature. The purpose of Daoism is harmony, to live in a plain and modest way and not to struggle for material gain, to discard selfishness, and seek to be a model of virtue. While Confucianism taught that all men are born equal and may improve their lot in life through education, Daoist belief is that the man was born with a basic nature that can never be changed. Both of these philosophies contributed to the Chinese society by providing lasting moral and social structures. Although dissimilar in some respects, they appeared not to clash, and in certain ways, even complement each other. Confucianism established rules of living and social classes, and Daoism ensured that the most unfortunate of those social classes calmly accepted their lot in life, did not wish for material possessions, or insisted on a better lot in life.

4. During the Tang Dynasty, the state took control of all the land and distributed it as appropriate. Within the Western tradition, land was a means of power and wealth. Through the system of “primogeniture”, the oldest son was often able to accumulate vast wealth through his inheritance and wealthy families were assured that they would remain in the aristocratic class for many years. Void of a system of primogeniture, how did China find a ruling class to manage the nation?

The Equal Field System, established during Sui Dynasty and reinforced during Tang Dynasty, enforced the idea of equality at birth. Each Chinese male was given thirteen acres of land, and after their death, the land was then distributed to another Chinese male, so the land could not be accumulated and couldn't become a ticket to power. Instead, the only ticket to power was through the exam system, in which every Chinese male could participate. Men attended the Confucian Academy, where the curriculum consisted of lessons about Confucius, and the Five Classics: Ancient Beliefs, History, Odes and

Poems, Life of Confucius, and the proper Confucian conduct. After passing the exam, they would become the ruling class. During the Tang Dynasty, this exam system was strengthened and the military aristocracy eliminated, so the exam could become the only path to elite. The ruling class was not chosen on the basis of material fortune, but on the knowledge of the Confucian writing. Furthermore, during the Tang Dynasty there was a distinct evolution of social classes: Shi - the Elite, Shu - the commoners, and Jian Min - mean people. One could not become Shi unless one could pass the exam. Once they became Shi, they ruled China directly under the supervision of the Emperor.

5. Describe the Ming Dynasty and explain how it evolved through the “Theory of Cyclic Decline”

The Theory of Cyclic Decline states that all things tarnish with time. Each new dynasty comes to power with new ideas but it would eventually start to fail, whether through fiscal difficulties, public unrest, or natural disasters, at which point the Emperor would lose the Mandate of Heaven, and a new Dynasty would rise with innovative ideas for the cycle to start all over again. Ming Dynasty was an era of great innovations, and it raised the standard of living throughout China. There were significant advances in agriculture, and the distribution of agriculture through restoration of dikes and canals. The last two Mongol tribes were conquered, the Chinese territory was expanded, and China's first maritime expeditions were undertaken. The Forbidden City was built, a remarkable architectural achievement that is still standing today. However, literati were spread thin so the local officials were in charge of tax collection, and would keep much of the money. This, along with lavish spending by the Emperor, caused fiscal problems which placed local infrastructure under strain. The Emperor was unable to prevent Japanese pirates from looting Chinese transports, and the Mongols in the North began to attack once again. All of these contributed to Ming decline, and ensured that the tarnished Dynasty would lose power and that a new Dynasty would rise with fresh ideas.